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TOMB OF NEKHT. WEST WALL (DETAIL). BLIND HARPER AND GUESTS AT A BANQUET

THE ROCK-CUT TOMBS OF SHEIKH ABD EL GURNEH, AT THEBES

NOTE

The Egyptian expedition of the Museum, supplementing its program of excavation, is engaged in providing for the Museum a record through copies, drawings, and photographs of the principal constructive and decorative features of the monuments, in illustration of the successive phases and periods of Egyptian art. In the *BULLETIN* for February a brief account was given of the work on Early-Christian Churches and Monasteries in pursuance of this plan. The following account describes the purpose of the further work of the expedition in the copying of the principal painted tombs of Thebes, on which Mr. Norman de Garis Davies and his assistants have been engaged since 1907.



EVERY people which buries its dead creates by so doing a new settlement, city answering to city, village to village, house to house, so that if no destructive forces were at work, the colony of the dead would be the counterpart of that of the living and mirror back not only its size, but its age and fortunes. In ancient Egypt faith in the after-life materialized itself in a necropolis

so durable that all the attacks of man and time have rarely prevailed against it, but left it still a veritable "city of the dead." Gizeh or Saqqareh, if relieved of their sands, would display a great field of solid buildings, their avenues intersecting at right angles with the regularity of a modern city. Draw sections of a great cliff-cemetery and you have the plan of a street-side in negative, where detached stone buildings are replaced by groups of chambers separated from one another by solid rock. The comparison with a city is all the more vivid in Egypt, since it was the custom there not only to supply the tomb with an equipment of utensils and furniture such as was found in the home, but even to employ in its chambers the wonted forms of house decoration. Thus, we not only derive most of our knowledge of the domestic furniture of the ancient Egyptians from the outfit placed in their tombs, but we must go to the same source almost exclusively for an acquaintance with the paintings and decorative designs which adorned their walls and ceilings. Moreover, as the subjects of these mural paintings in the tombs were determined by the use to which the rooms were put, we have not only scenes connected with burial in the burial chamber, but representations of daily life in the outer room where the dead hoped to resume something resembling his round of existence before death.

In this happy way our knowledge of their domestic life, work, sport, and official routine and the objects connected there-

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

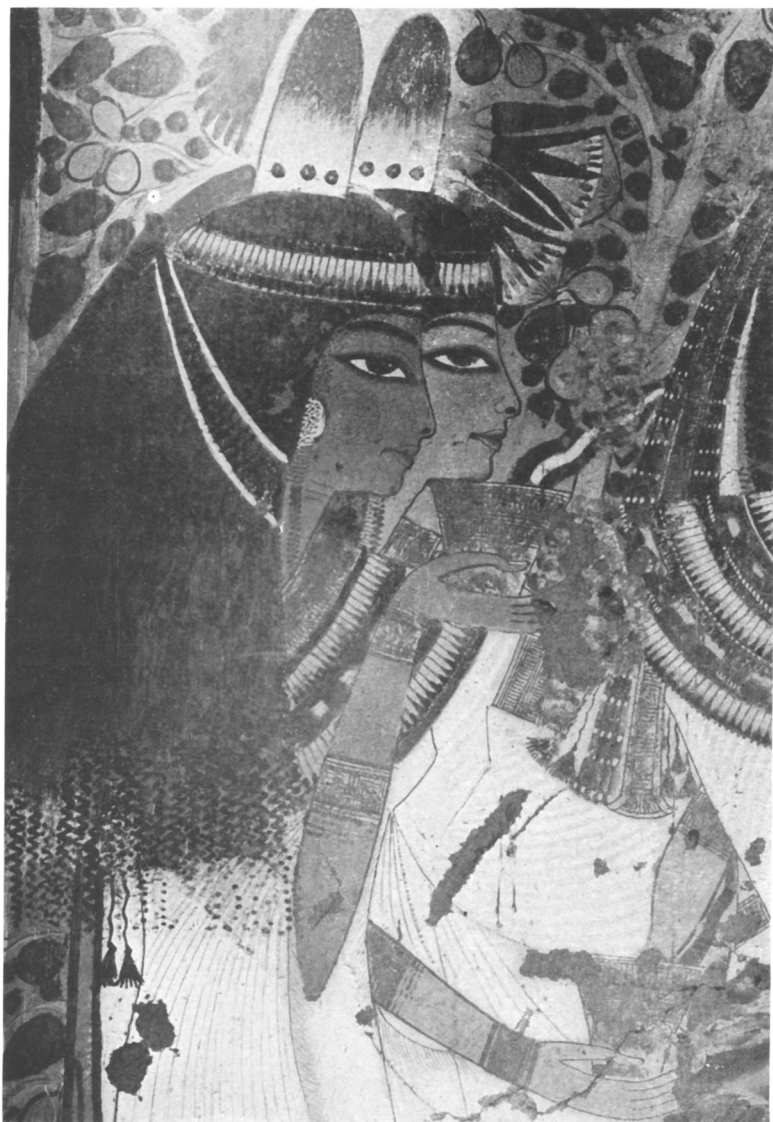
PRICE TEN CENTS

BULLETIN OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

VOLUME VI

NEW YORK, MARCH, 1911

NUMBER 3



TOMB OF WESERHAT, AT THEBES. EAST WALL (DETAIL). THE WIFE AND
MOTHER OF WESERHAT

with, is augmented by a series of designs, all the more valuable because often carried out in great detail and beautiful color. If the same subjects recur with only too frequent iteration, they admit of large variation also; so that taken together, the paintings in the tombs of the Egyptians portray the greater part of their activities.

As Thebes was the capital city of Egypt during her age of greatest wealth and power its necropolis is, or has been, the richest of all. Thebes of the living lay on the east bank of the river and is represented now by

leads to the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings. Between these limits the several portions of the necropolis have received the names of Qurnet Murrai, Deir el Medineh, Sheikh Abd el Qurneh, Qurneh itself, and Draa Abu'l Naga. The range of time that these cemeteries represent extends from the early days of the Middle Kingdom (with scanty remains of pyramidal tombs) to the gigantic subterranean labyrinths of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. The necropolis is richest in tombs of the Eighteenth Dynasty—the golden age of Egypt—which honey-

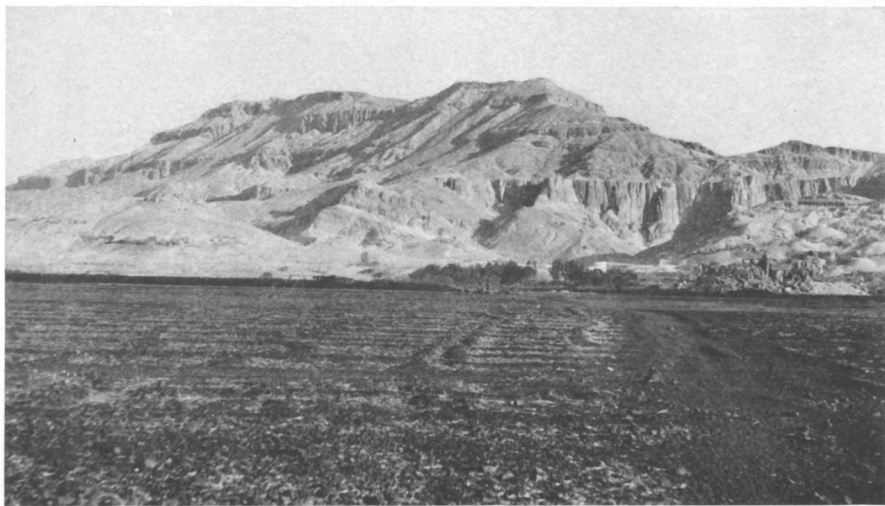


FIG. 1. THE THEBAN NECROPOLIS, FROM THE EAST. THE TOMBS OF SHEIKH ABD EL QURNEH ARE AT THE EXTREME RIGHT

little more than the great temples and a quay. Thebes of the dead was founded on the west side where, beyond a short stretch of cultivated land, the Nile cliffs rise from the desert foothills (see fig. 1). Of the myriad tombs, small and great, hewn in the cliff or sunk in the slopes, many guarded their treasures well into the last century and not a few (unless on a comparative reckoning) have preserved their mural decorations more or less perfectly to these days. The necropolis extends for three miles or more and includes at least two ravines which penetrate into the hills. That on the south is the Valley of the (Rameside) Queens; the long ravine on the north

comb the hill and the slope below at Sheikh Abd el Qurneh especially (see fig. 2).

Geologically, the site consists of a mass of poor limestone overlying a bed of shale, beneath which again is a stratum of close-grained limestone. In the few spots where the latter comes near the surface it has been utilized to produce mural sculpture of the very finest quality (tombs of Kha-em-hat, Ra-mes, Pu-em-ra, and several others less noteworthy). In most places, however, sculpture was impossible and the walls had to be covered with a thick coating of lime plaster, or of mud faced thinly with stucco. On this the scenes were painted, generally against a white background, sometimes

very flatly and coarsely, sometimes with extreme elaboration and very considerable artistic beauty. It is this prevalence of painting at Thebes which gives the necropolis its unrivaled value for art and history, since it not only afforded free play to the draughtsmanship and decorative instinct of the Egyptian artist, but enabled him to add a greater wealth of detail than would have been attainable in stone. Moreover, for various reasons, these paintings have run the gauntlet of innumerable perils with greater success, and now afford us our most

mural scenes can rarely, if ever, reach our museums; and so copies of these decorations are invaluable for museum illustration, forming as they do a valuable commentary on objects which every museum needs, and often supplying that explanation of purpose and mode of use which is otherwise lacking. Each of the great Egyptian collections in European museums has some such archive behind it. Berlin possesses the original copies of the monuments made by Lepsius; Paris, those by Champollion, Nestor l'Hôte, and Prisse; London, the

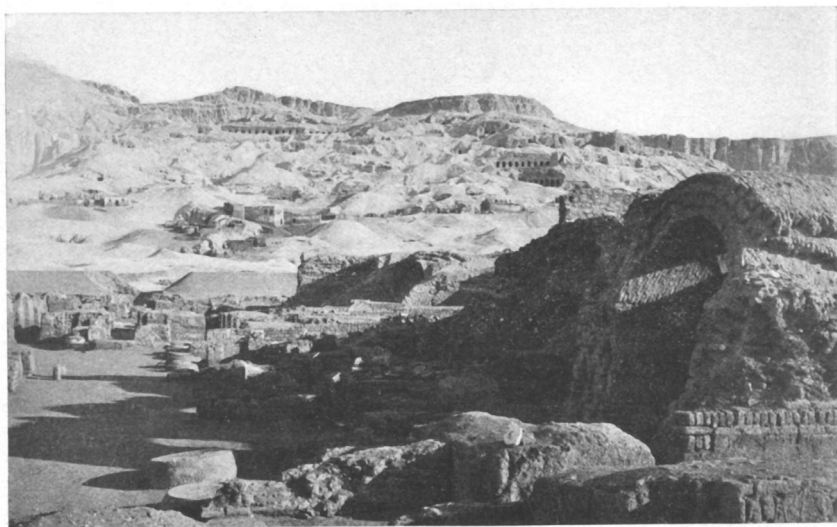


FIG. 2. SHEIKH ABD EL QURNEH, FROM THE RAMESSEUM. THE ENTRANCE DOORWAYS OF SOME OF THE TOMBS MAY BE SEEN IN THE HILLSIDE

complete picture of Egyptian manners and customs.

Of the civilization of ancient Thebes, thus a twofold representation has come down to us—(1) through the objects themselves, many of which have now come into our public and private collections; and (2) through the mural representations of the same things. The actual specimen is no doubt to be more highly prized than the pictured representation, especially for Museum use; yet the latter has certain advantages, showing variety which could not be matched in any collection and a magnificence of form and decoration not often reached in actual manufacture. These

unequaled manuscripts of Robert Hay. Much of the material contained in these records has now perished, but as valuable a corpus as appealed to these indefatigable workers of the last century calls for record in the Theban necropolis to-day.

To meet the needs thus outlined, our Egyptian expedition began a campaign of epigraphical and copying work at Thebes in 1907-08. Although much there had been copied or published in some shape, few copies were in a form with which any serious archæologist could be satisfied. Copying in color was impossible to most of the earlier workers, owing to the magnitude of the task; only Prisse d'Avennes achieved

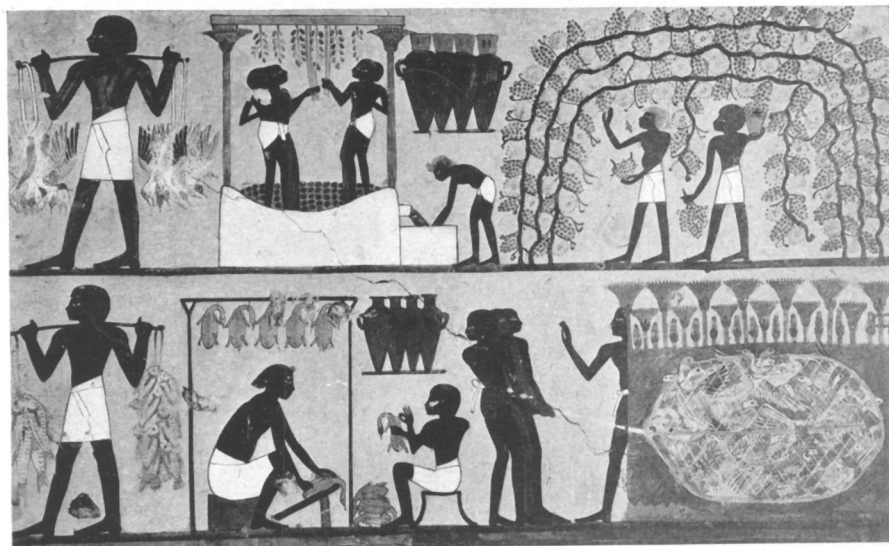


FIG. 4. TOMB OF NEKHT. WEST WALL (DETAIL). VINEYARD AND WINE PRESS. THE NETTING AND PLUCKING OF WILD FOWL



FIG. 5. TOMB OF NEKHT. EAST WALL (DETAIL). NEKHT WATCHING THE PREPARATION OF THE SOIL. ABOVE, HARVESTING THE GRAIN

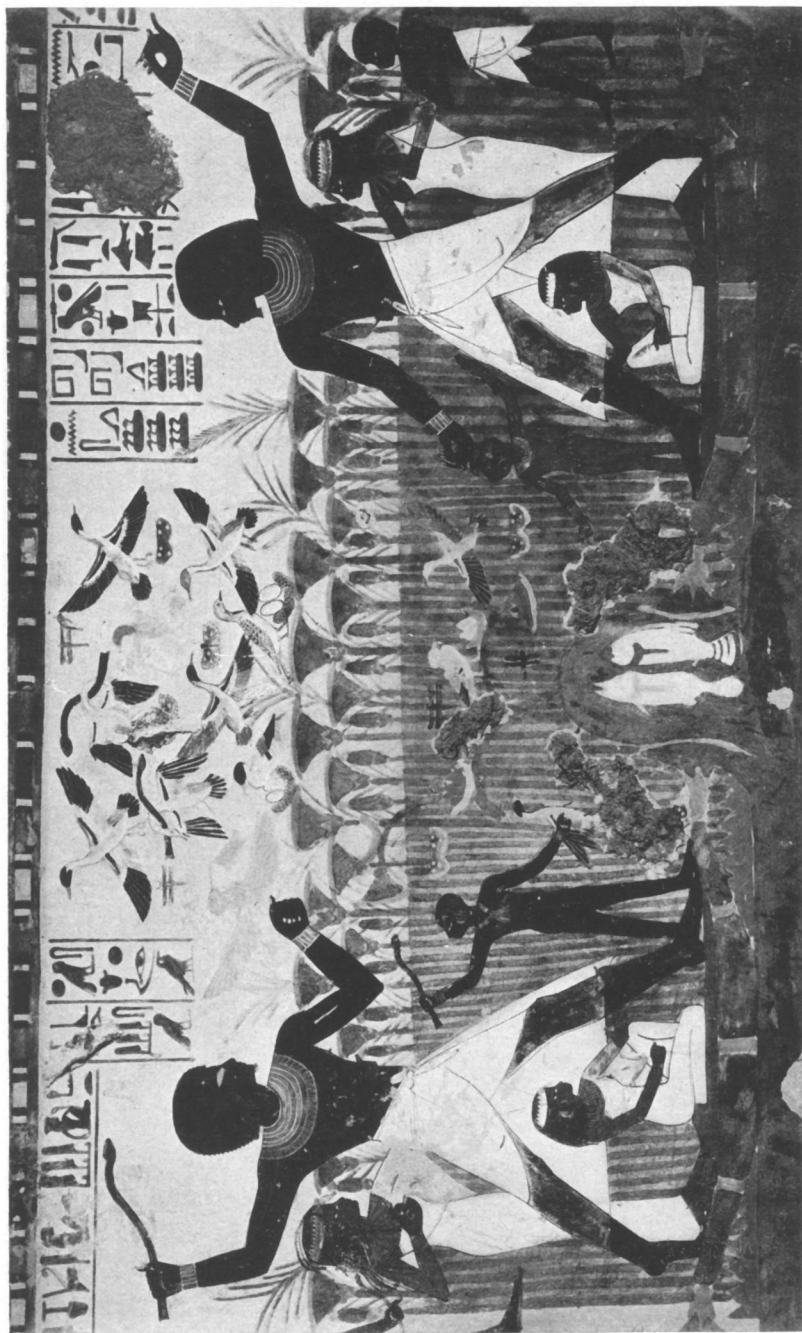


FIG. 3. TOMB OF NEKHT. WEST WALL (DETAIL). NEKHT AND HIS FAMILY FOWLING AND SPEARING FISH IN THE MARSHES. "NEKHT TRAVERSING THE NESTING POOLS, PENETRATING THE WATER THICKETS, AMUSING HIMSELF IN SPEARING FISH,"

anything noteworthy in this respect. It is especially in photography and color that our staff hopes to put new facilities and modern inventions to good purpose and thus give its archives not only artistic worth but a new evidential character.

The work which has now been done on these tombs by our expedition during the past three years may be tabulated thus:

1. The tomb of an official named Nekht (cf. figs. 3-6), which is a great favorite with travelers on account of its ex-

thus be given of the complete tomb chamber with its decorated walls and ceiling.

2. The tomb of Thoth-em-heb (cf. fig. 7), which presented the peculiar feature of having been completed in the Eighteenth Dynasty but appropriated by a descendant a century or so later and its wall scenes altered to suit the changed ideas of the time, has also been completely copied, largely in color.

3. To illustrate the great change of form and subject in mural decoration which was



FIG. 6. TOMB OF NEKHT. WEST WALL (DETAIL). NEKHT'S SON AND DANCING TROUPE

treme brightness of color and its excellent preservation and is perhaps the most typical extant Theban tomb of the Eighteenth Dynasty, has been copied in color (tempera) to full size. The facsimile of this tomb thus produced is to be reconstructed in our Museum and a clear conception will

introduced with the Nineteenth Dynasty, a newly discovered chamber has been copied. This, the tomb of Weserhat, a priest (in the Nineteenth Dynasty) of the deceased king Thothmes I, affords some pictures of exceptional charm and interest. (See Frontispiece and fig. 8.)

N. DE G. DAVIES.



FIG. 7. TOMB OF THOTH-EM-HEB. EAST WALL (DETAIL). THOTH AND HIS MOTHER SITTING AT TABLE.

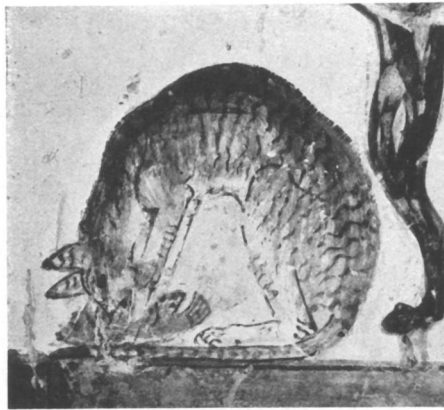
“THE SCRIBE THOTH AND HIS BELOVED MOTHER THOTH ARRIVING IN PEACE THROUGH DOING THE WILL OF AMON, AND RECEIVING THE DAILY BREAD”



FIG. 8. TOMB OF WESERHAT. SOUTH WALL (DETAIL). PROCESSION OF PRIESTS AND PRIESTESSES

BULLETIN OF THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

CLASS	OBJECT	SOURCE
TEXTILES..... (Floor II, Wing E.)	teenth century; three Holbein rugs, late fifteenth century; five rugs, sixteenth century—Western Asia Minor; rug, Central Asia Minor, late fifteenth century; two rugs and a fragment of a rug, Asia Minor, sixteenth to seventeenth century; part of a border of a large rug, Indian, about 1600.....	Lent by Mr. C. F. Williams.
(Floor II, Wing E.)	Rug, Armenian fifteenth century; rug, fifteenth century; rug, sixteenth century; rug, about 1650 — Asia Minor; prayer rug, Turkish, seventeenth century; garden rug, North Persian, about 1750..	Lent by Mr. Theodore M. Davis.
(Floor II, Wing E.)	Collection of one hundred and two examples of bobbin lace and needlepoint lace, drawn-work and embroidery, European, sixteenth to nineteenth century.....	Lent by Mrs. George Blumenthal.
(Floor II, Wing E.)	Four Aprons, Italian, seventeenth century; seven examples of needlepoint lace, Point d'Argentan, French, 1671.....	Lent by Mrs. J. Pierpont Morgan, Jr.
(Floor II, Wing E.)	Piece of bobbin lace, English, nineteenth century.....	Lent by Mrs. Allan McLane Mowry.



TOMB OF NEKHT. WEST WALL (DETAIL).
THE PET CAT OF NEKHT'S WIFE, TAUR
(SEE PAGE 58)